

Jesus the Bread of Heaven

John 6:25-59

Warm-up Question: What's the hardest work you ever had to do?

²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" ²⁶ Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. ²⁷ Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval." ²⁸ Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" ²⁹ Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." ³⁰ So they asked him, "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?" ³¹ Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" ³² Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." ³⁴ "Sir," they said, "from now on give us this bread." ³⁵ Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. ³⁶ But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. ³⁷ All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁰ For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." ⁴¹ At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." ⁴² They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven?'" ⁴³ "Stop grumbling among yourselves," Jesus answered. ⁴⁴ "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. ⁴⁶ No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷ I tell you the truth, he who believes

has everlasting life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. ⁵⁰ But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." ⁵² Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" ⁵³ Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. ⁵⁶ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. ⁵⁷ Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever." ⁵⁹ He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum (John 6:25-59).

The Work that God Requires

As many of you know, my father was a commercial fisherman. I worked with him on his fishing boat, a trawler named *Why Worry*, for a number of years in my teens and early twenties. The only problem I had in working with my dad was he never wanted to stop working! He enjoyed working and took very few days off. The only day we did not go out fishing was Saturday, and that was only because the fish market was not open on Sundays. Six days a week I worked, from 2:30 in the morning until 5:00 at night. It was one of the hardest and most dangerous jobs that one could do, in my opinion. "Tom" Thomas, my dad, loved his job, loved his boat, and he was very good at catching fish, mostly Dover Soles. He especially enjoyed going out when the weather was bad, much to my dislike. He didn't seem to mind the pitching and rolling all day while the *Why Worry*, would angrily hit the sea at every wave we would plough through, all for the sake of earning a bit more money. When the sea was angry and rough, fish prices would often be higher at the market which gave my dad even more desire to be out there in the worst of weather. As a teenager, I had huge earning potential for my young age. I earned

four times the normal take-home pay of a married man when I was only seventeen. The risk of the job was that dangerous things could happen at sea. It was only after I had a few bouts with unexploded mines being caught in our nets, banging on the side of our boat that I began to worry. Life itself seemed very fragile. I had a number of near-death experiences around that time and at one point went overboard entangled in the net. The Lord always protected us even though I knew nothing about Him. It wasn't just the unexploded mines, there were other dangers, and I had no assurance concerning what would happen to me when I died. While on the boat, I often had opportunity to read. I began to read books about what death was like—it seemed to be something that I could not let go of.

Something was drawing me towards finding the answers to many of life's mysteries, especially the question about whether or not I would live beyond death, and what that life would be like. My spiritual hunger progressed to the point where I sought out the answers to life in Philosophic works. It didn't satisfy my gnawing spiritual hunger. My dad would let me take extended time off work, as long as I had someone experienced to take over from me. I began to travel and search out Buddhism and Hinduism over a couple of year's period, thinking those religions would satisfy my craving for the missing piece of the jigsaw puzzle of my life. Something was missing and no matter where I went, it eluded me. I went all over Europe, Asia, and North Africa too, eventually travelling to South and North America. Whenever thoughts about searching out Christianity came to me, I would immediately dismiss them due to my belief that it was all about someone who died two thousand years ago as a martyr. I had heard it said that "all one had to do was believe." But that was too simple for me! I was so used to working hard for everything I got, that the answer to my longing for truth deceived me into thinking that I had to work hard to get it, that it had to "be attained." I thought that it would have to be costly or far away! My concept of being a spiritual person began to feel like an unobtainable goal. I wanted to understand the secrets of the universe; it could not possibly be something that was simple, yet Jesus presented truths that a child could understand. Could it be that simple? Just to "believe" was opposite of all that I had learned about life up to that point. My problem was that I didn't know what God was like—that He is a Lover and a Giver, and that He is the only One that can satisfy the hunger of my soul and yours too, for He is

the Bread of Heaven.

How have your initial thoughts about God changed over time?

In the sixth chapter of John, after the feeding of five thousand people, those who were returning were surprised that Jesus was in Capernaum before them for they did not see Him getting into the boat the evening before (verse 25). They went to the Synagogue that morning (John 6:59), and began to ask Him questions about what they must do in order to "do the works of God." Others in the Synagogue that morning were folk that were with Him the day before, whom He had fed with the loaves and fish. To those, He said that they were only pursuing Him because they wanted to be fed again, as they had been the day before. If this was the Messiah, they thought, the scripture says that He would be like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15), so maybe He would feed them every day just as Moses did with the Manna from Heaven (Exodus 16:45). Wouldn't that be wonderful! Not to have any food bill week by week. Think of the amount of money we could save! Jesus quickly reminds them that it was not Moses that fed them with Manna, it was God. Moses had little to do with the receiving of the Manna except to eat it like everyone else. Again, this shows us the nature of Christ that He is zealous for God to get the glory due to Him for everything He did. He wanted to point them to the Father and for the crowd to realize who He really was, as that was far more important than witnessing a miracle. Jesus wanted to challenge their motives. Why did they come out to hear Him? There were also those that were not physically hungry, but hungry for the "supernatural experience." Jesus wanted them to realize that HE was the experience, the life that they craved for.

His heart went out to them for their pursuing Him for daily food like they had received the day before. He said, "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life" (verse 27). Just as eating a large meal gives one a satisfied feeling within, resulting in us feeling full, in the same way, we are to spend energy and labor pursuing the things that truly satisfy the soul—Christ Himself and His Word. Without this food that endures to eternal life, we are empty and dissatisfied within ourselves. We have a tendency to spend more time at our commercial labor to give us large houses and brand new cars, but this is spiritual poverty, such as the church of Laodicea mentioned in the Book

of Revelation. When Christ confronted them because they were lukewarm, He told them their true condition as He saw it:

¹⁷ You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked (Revelation 3:17).

God forbid it that we get to heaven and find that we are poor in the things of God because we valued spending our time on our daily business, many of us going far beyond putting bread on the table, rather than seeking to prosper in the things of God. This was what I began to realize as a commercial fisherman. Why was I working such long hours for more money than I needed or could spend? Why was I enduring such dangers? I chose to take months off at a time searching for the needs of my soul. There was something within, a missing piece of the jigsaw puzzle of life, an emptiness that I could not get a handle on. The symptoms of my inner disharmony and emptiness were that I could not rest until I found whatever it was I was looking for. This was a gift of God and a healthy thing for my soul. This was what drove me to travel the world in search of whatever it was that I was missing. When I was 15 I thought that I would have that fulfillment in life by being part of the "in" crowd, and then I'd really feel like I'd made it. That didn't satisfy my inner emptiness. Then it was having a girlfriend, and a cool scooter to carry my girlfriend on the back. Then it was a car, a house, even my own fishing boat with my brother. When those things didn't satisfy, it was drugs and then travelling, but nothing satiated my inner thirst and hunger. Prince Charles of England once spoke of his belief that, for all the advances of science, "There remains deep in the soul, if I dare use that word, a persistent and unconscious anxiety that something is missing, some ingredient that makes life worth living." Bernard Levin, perhaps the greatest English columnist of this generation, once wrote about the void in his life, he said:

"Countries like ours are full of people who have all the material comforts they desire, together with such non-material blessings as a happy family, and yet lead lives of quiet, and at times noisy, desperation, understanding nothing but the fact that there is a hole inside them and that however much food and drink they pour into it, however many motor cars and television sets they stuff it with, however many well balanced children and loyal

friends they parade around the edges of it....it aches."¹

Have you experienced inner disharmony? What words would you use to describe an "inner void?" How have you tried to fill that void?

For many people, this void drives them to work hard, thinking that success at work will satisfy their inner emptiness. I remember one day when I was working my dad's boat alone (something that was very dangerous to do), I went further to a fishing ground that we usually didn't go to. For an eighteen hour period I caught more fish than I had ever caught before. I hit the big time! Now I was earning real money. I became giddy at my own success but did not like that I could not sleep that night, thinking of how I could do better and make more money. I took a look in the mirror and I did not like what I saw; greed sat on the throne of my heart. Success at work did not satisfy. It is a deception to think that we can work hard to please God.

The people that now spoke with Jesus had the same thoughts on their mind: "What must we do to do the works God requires?" (verse 28). Jesus replied saying that the only work that would satisfy their souls was to believe in the One that the Father had sent—Christ: "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent" (verse 29). God has deliberately made it so simple that a child can come to Christ and be saved.

Jesus the Bread of Life

Only Christ can fill the void that is deep within us. He tells them:

"For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world" (verse 33).

When they respond with desire for such bread, saying, "From **now on** give us this bread" (verse 34), their words reveal that they are hoping for some daily food that will come to them from now on, just like the Manna came every day. But Jesus is talking in spiritual terms:

³⁵ Then Jesus declared, "**I am the bread of life**. He who **comes to me** will never go hungry, and **he who believes in me** will never be thirsty (John 6:35).

Bread was the staple of life in Israel in those days. My wife Sandy and I lived in Israel for several months with

¹ As quoted by Nicky Gumbel, Questions of Life, Published by Cook Ministry Publications. Page 13.

an Australian lady named Christine. She was married to a Japanese man, Bara, now a registered Israeli tour guide. No matter how full Bara was, if he didn't have rice with his meal he hadn't eaten a proper meal. It was like he had two stomachs—if his rice stomach had not been fed, he was still hungry; and had to go and cook rice after eating a big dinner of meat and potatoes. It did not matter how big the meal was, if he did not have rice, he was not satisfied. Deep inside our being we have an inner stomach that needs spiritual food. Jesus said "I am the bread of life" I am the one that fills the empty "spiritual stomach". If the Lord had been speaking to a Japanese person, perhaps He might have said, "I am the rice of life." Only Christ can fill our spiritual stomach. He is the staple diet of the soul.

Here in this scripture above (John 6:35), we have the essence of how to become a Christian and have the emptiness within our hearts fulfilled. It is to feast on His life in a spiritual sense. It is coming to Christ and believing or trusting in Him. This experience of eating this bread is not so much talking about a once for a lifetime bite, as in inviting Christ into one's life and being born again, but a daily feasting on Christ, being changed into His image and likeness as we live for Him. Paul the apostle puts it like this: 18 And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory (2 Corinthians 3:18). We are transformed inwardly as we appropriate His power and life just as a branch from a Vine draws its life from the Vine stock itself. Using the Vine analogy Jesus said:

⁴ Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. ⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:4-5).

There is a spiritual connection between us and God that is made upon conversion to Christ. The Spirit of God comes and lives in you and helps you maintain that connection, a flow of spiritual life from God, a sustenance that gives one a sense that all is well with that person's soul. We can grieve the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30) through any willful sin that we do, and open ourselves up to chastening by Him (Hebrews 12:8-10), but once you have made that connection to Him, you will never go

hungry and will never be thirsty (verse 35). Once I came to Christ, I have never looked further. I knew instantly that this was what I was looking for. My inner hunger and thirst for God was filled, and so can yours be, if it isn't already. Commentator R. Kent Hughes says this about Christ being the bread of life:

"There are several similarities between manna and Jesus, "the bread of life." The manna typified Jesus, for it was white like fallen snow, just as Christ was without blemish or imperfection. Manna was also accessible. That was one of its main virtues. When a man walked outside the camp to gather it, he had a choice. He could either tread on it or he could pick it up. We can either tread on Jesus or we can take him as our Savior. To put it another way, the Scriptures say Jesus can either be a cornerstone or a stumbling block. How we respond to Him makes all the difference."²

The Drawing Power of God

It was only after I came to Christ that I realized that the Spirit of God had been drawing me, and that was why I had such a deep inner longing. Here's the way Jesus describes this drawing power:

All that **the Father gives me will come to me**, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away (John 6: 37).

"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me **draws him**, and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:44).

When you came to Christ (if you are a Christian) it was because you were drawn in some way that you probably do not understand. It might have been a friend whose life seemed "different." It could have been a message that somehow struck home deeply. It could have been the deep dissatisfaction that we have already talked about. It could have been a book that you read where a certain sentence stuck out and gripped you like a hook; it stuck fast in your soul and it was just a matter of "reeling you in" to Christ. These are all evidences of the Spirit at work wooing you to Jesus, so that you might receive the gift of the life of God deposited in you. In verse 45, Jesus again describes how God works in this way, "Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him **comes to me**" (verse 45).

Share your experience with one another of the drawing power of God. How did it happen to you personally?

² R. Kent Hughes, That You May Believe, Commentary on the Book of John, Page 206, Crossway Publishers.

Eating Christ's Flesh and Drinking His Blood

⁵³ Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. ⁵⁶ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him (John 6:53-56).

What a difficult statement to make to a Jew, no wonder many of them turned back from following Him at that point (John 6:66). God had forbidden them as a nation to drink blood (Genesis 9:4; Leviticus 7:26-27), so how are we to interpret this statement? There are those that claim that they have the power to literally change bread and wine into the body of Christ and His blood. But is this correct? Should we take this as a literal statement or a spiritual statement? Jesus explains quite clearly that He is speaking in spiritual terms, He says, "The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life (John 6:63). We had no problem understanding Jesus when He spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well in Samaria, that when He was talking about the woman drinking the water that He would give, He was talking in terms of the Spirit of God (John 4:13-14). Why should we think in literal terms about eating his flesh and drinking His blood? When He said, "I am the vine" (John 15:5) or, "I am the door of the sheep" (John 10:10), I don't believe for a minute that He was speaking in literal terms. He was speaking in picture language. The Passover lamb, which was a type of the sacrificial death of Christ, had to be completely consumed and none left over for the morning (Exodus 12:9-10). This speaks in spiritual terms that the encounter with Him that we are called to, is to be total. There is no room for half-heartedness with Christ. One must give up one's life completely (Luke 9:23-26). We must consume Jesus, the Bread of Life, completely to be His follower. Just as bread and wine is taken by the blood of our bodies and gives life to every part, so partaking of Christ's life and being

continually feeding on Him in a spiritual sense, is to allow His life to touch every area of our character. It is a constant daily being filled and controlled by His Spirit, living for Him and not ourselves. The Bible is clear as to what happens to us when we give our lives to Christ, it says, "For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3). The only way to eternal life is to partake of the Bread of Life, the staple diet of the Christian. This calls for radical steps of giving up ownership to yourself and your all. Isaac Watts, the Christian hymn writer said, "Were the whole realm of nature mine, That were an offering far too small; Love so amazing, so divine, Demands my soul, my life, my all." Do you have Him? Does He have you?

After wandering the world hungry and thirsting for what I did not know, somebody at last sat down with me and explained the gospel, that Jesus loved me and you, that He died in my place as a substitute for me and as me. I finally understood that God is not angry towards you and me. That He beckons me to come to Christ and believe the gospel and be radically changed within. To receive Him into the very substance of my being and feed on Him for the rest of my life, which starts as soon as one takes the step of believing and receiving Him. I received Christ the first time I had it explained to me, and I have never been hungry since. This eternal life that we are given begins upon taking that step of faith. Jesus could not be clearer about it than when He made this statement:

I tell you the truth, he who believes **has** everlasting life (John 6:47).

Here's a prayer that you can pray:

Prayer: Father, thank you for giving your Son as the Bread of Life. I now come to Him and entrust my life to Him. I turn from my empty way of life and believe the good news: that Jesus, the Son of God died for me, in my place, to pay for my sins so that I can receive the gift of eternal life. I receive Him today, eternal Life and Eternal Bread for my soul. Amen.

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